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they bathed the squealing, downy infant all over, baptizing him with this herb-scented water of the beast of the desert into the sacred fellowship of the wilderness.

I was still thinking how unexpectedly this incident had come to pass, when I was startled by heavy pattering on the tent-roof and on the sand outside. Everywhere, on tents and on the backs of the camels, it was raining big, fat, reddish locusts!

The new baby boy's mother was just then squatting in her smoke-filled tent, engaged, with the assistance of her women friends, in swathing his little body in a plaster of dried camel dung and old rags—a measure considered indispensable among the Bedouins for the protection of newly born children. But, all-important as this ceremony was, all the women except the mother rushed away pell-mell, to help their menfolk and children to harvest the locusts.

These kept coming up in swarms—nay, in cloud piled on cloud. While myriads whirred past and on with a loud noise, a host of them broke flight and settled. Wherever one looked, the ground was thick with them, covered, as it were, with a crawling red carpet. Grass, herbage, bushes melted away under the devouring mass of insects. And the whole camp was out gathering them.

Soon locusts were roasting at every fire, round which men, women, and children squatted in a circle. They picked up the insects by their gauzy wings, plucked off the legs, dipped the roasted "husks" in salt, and ate them, skin and all.

Boiled, I did not like locusts; they had the taste of particularly insipid cabbage or some such vegetable.

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Roasted, I found them more palatable; crisp outside, and inside something like tender spinach. In neither case did they taste at all like meat. They are clean animals and as food not at all unpleasant, but one soon gets very tired of them, when one has to eat nothing else day after day.

All round the camp and all day long smoke screens were kept going, into which women and children drove the locusts. Next morning mountains of these insects lay drying in the sun, and when we left this camp site a few days later, there was not an empty sack or saddle-bag, and our camels carried gigantic loads of the dried insects. Men and women, dogs and camels, fed on them —but only for a few days; after that, they turned one's stomach. But what was left was carefully preserved for other and leaner times, for when the locusts swarm in vast numbers, one can safely predict drought and famine.

As we followed in the wake of these marauders, we found the land stripped bare; every bit of herbage had disappeared under their greedy maws. But I came to realize that the "plague of locusts" is not so utterly devastating in the desert as it is to the tillers of the soil in Transjordania, Palestine, and Egypt. In the desert it is a great blessing for all creatures. Buzzards, ravens, bustards and other desert game-birds fattened on the locusts, and flocks of storks trailed after the red clouds. Even to the human desert-dwellers they may be most useful. Faris told me that tens of thousands of Bedouins had to subsist for weeks on locusts alone, and that at times their camels and horses too can have no other fodder. During four-days' march northward—forty-five

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not take sides against the French. The French authorities immediately realized the danger, and promptly gave orders that the ancient caravan route from Damascus to Tudmur (Palmyra) and Deyr-ez-Zor (which passes south of the hills of the Abu Rijmeyn and branches off near Tudmur towards Baghdad) was to form the most northerly boundary beyond which the Ruala might not seek pasture. None must cross this line if armed or mounted.

Now the foes of the Ruala could triumph!

The Saba, the Muwali, Hadediyyin and all the others had the law of the land and the power of the French Government on their side—and they were confederates of Ibn Meheyd! What did they care for the misery of the Ruala? They only saw at hand a long-desired opportunity to fall upon and destroy this hated Ruala nation and take possession of their vast herds.

It was a day in April, when our distress seemed to have reached the last extremity beyond which endurance could not go—when death stared every man and animal in the face—that I entered the tent of Faris, which was pitched on a hillock a little apart. The tent was empty. The mother and sister of the young man were probably searching for truffles, roots and dry herbs for fuel. As I flung myself down by the glowing ashes inside the tent, I heard the voice of Faris ibn Naif-behind the tent. It was loud and excited, which was an unusual thing for him, for the calm and self-control of my friend had always been exemplary. He was neither a Philistine nor a bigot, but a man of a moral purity such as I never found surpassed, even among the Bedouins. I

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destroyed. In the afternoons and evenings the young people hasten to the water holes, *rudrân*, in the valley bottoms for their ablutions. They bathe separately, the youths in one place, the girls in another. Their shouts of joy and various songs are heard on all sides. In the tents mushrooms and truffles, young bulbs, and fresh vegetables are cooked and enjoyed.

The local name for the mushrooms is *hawbar*. They grow after warm night rains, *emṭer bel-lejl w-râḥ jaṭaǧanna-l-hawbar*. On the mornings following such nights both men and women go out in search of this dainty, which grows best of all near the channels, while the truffle prefers soil mixed or strewn with sand. When they come to the surface the latter form tiny hat-like lumps, which attract the eye of the picker. The earth or sand covering them is then turned over by the hand or a stick, and the truffle dug out. In cooking they are boiled in salt water and then served with butter or camel's fat. Another method is to bake them in hot ashes after a thorough salting.

Of the truffle, *faḳa'*, there are three kinds: *al-čema, az-zbejdi*, and *al-ḥlâṣi*. A Bedouin, having gathered a heap of truffles, sorted them in his tent according to their kinds, saying: "This one is *al-čmajje*, the mother of the little girl will get that; this *az-zbejdi* I will give to the mother of my little son; and the best, *al-ḥlâṣi*, I shall keep myself; *al-čmajje lumm al-bnajje az-zbejdi lumm wlejdi al-ḥlâṣi larâsi*."

All Bedouins greatly enjoy the small bulbs of certain wild plants, especially *aṭ-ṭiṭa, rubaḥla, karrâṯ*, etc. Mothers send their boys in search of them with the words: "My little sons, O sonnies! go bring me *aṭ-ṭiṭa*; I will prepare for you *muṭiṭa* (a dish of mashed bulbs); *'ejâli jâ 'ejâl aṭ-ṭiṭa w-muṭlekom muṭiṭa*."

In the sun-baked gravel plains (called *ḥamâd*) in a year of abundance the *semḥ* grows with its subvarieties, *ad-da'â'* and *al-ḥawwa*. These plants, when already ripe and still fresh are much sought after by the Bedouins, who place them in pits safe from water or in bags. When dry the plants are beaten with sticks and shaken, and the seed, *če'ber*, which have fallen to the ground, are put into sacks, *'edûl*, and brought to rain-water holes, where they are either left for some time or at least thoroughly soaked until the dry husks crack. Sometimes the large leather water troughs, *ḥows*, are filled with water and the full shells are put in; in time they swell and burst.

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Instead of wheat the poorer of the Rwala obtain white sorghum, *ḏera' bêḍa'*, which costs half as much and can be used in exactly the same way as wheat. From it they bake bread called *ṭurmuḏ*, boil *'ejš* known as *ṛaziẓa*, roast the grains to *ḥamîsa*, and eat the plain flour as *lehme*.

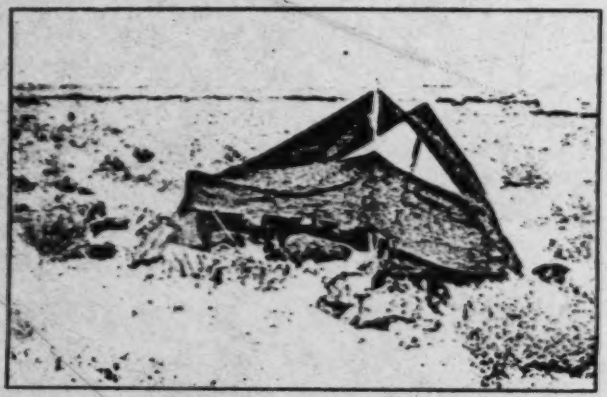

FIG. 24—A small tent, *fuzz* (see p. 72).

*Semḥne* or *sebîb* is the seed of the different varieties of *semḥ* plant. It takes the place of both wheat and *ḏera'*, and from it food can be prepared in exactly the same way as from these. Those who have no other food and neither taste the seed of the *ad-da'â'* variety of *semḥ* nor eat the *al-ḥawiwa'* herb, even though they may be tormented by hunger, are generally regarded as being hardy; *hwa walad mâ ḏâḳ ad-da'â' w-lâ akal al-ḥawiwa' jôm ǧâ'*.

## LOCUSTS, DATES, SALT, WATER, EDIBLE PLANTS

For the poorer Rwala locusts, *ǧerâd*, are an important article of diet. The large green varieties often cover shrubs by the myriad and do not move till the dew has evaporated. The Rwala women come and throw handfuls of locusts into large bags, tie them up, dig a narrow, deep trench, *bûra*, and make a fire in it. When the bottom of the trench is covered with glowing ashes they shake the locusts into it, shouting: "Father of roasting, roast them! *jâ-ba-l-ḥmes eḥemseh*." The dead locusts are dried in the sun and either ground immediately

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to powder, or strung on long threads, or scooped by hand into leather bags. The locusts taste like the tails of crayfish. They are eaten either without any preparation, *neǧḏân*, or food is prepared from them as from wheat.

In addition to bread, *ʿejš*, and locusts the Rwala eat the following:

*ʿaṣide*, a gruel made of milk and some flour,

*bečile*, a paste made from dates and flour,

*basîse*, a thin paste for young children, made of grape honey (*debs*) and wheat flour,

*madrûse*, a thin paste made of dates, boiled wheat, and butter,

*maṭbûḫa*, dates boiled in butter,

*ḫmejʿa*, bread boiled in milk and covered with camel's suet.

*Burrul*, husked wheat, and *ruzz*, rice, are very seldom found with the common Rwala.

The Rwala buy salt in the settlements of the Sirḥân depression. It is obtained in especially large quantities in the environs of Čâf and Eṭra. The settlers run the salt water into shallow pools, collect, *jezabberûn*, the salt left after evaporation into baskets made of palm fibers, *zebîl*, and shake it out in heaps, *ḫawâṣel*. They measure it like corn and sell it. A single camel load (about 150 kilograms) costs a quarter or half a *meǧidijje*, according to quality, in addition to the tax for the chief. The best varieties of salt are those called *ʿažiž* and *eṭrâwi*. Varieties of an inferior quality are known as *sabḫâwi*, which is obtained from the dried-up swamps, and *ṯḥejni*, or ground rock salt, of which there is an abundance in several regions.

For the preparation of food women require water, which they fetch themselves if a well is near, but which is brought by the herdsmen from wells at a great distance. Water is never wasted, and the Rwala look after it carefully, especially when they are on the march. On war expeditions or during raids the commander sees that each one obtains an equal amount of water. At sunset he picks up a pebble, places it in a wooden *žedaḥ*, and pours water on it until it is immersed. This is each man's share, *meḳṣâd az-zelema*. If hard pressed the Rwala kill the fattest camel, cut out the paunch, *čarš*, place it on a cloak, and squeeze the liquid from it into a leather bag, allowing it to cool and settle. They either drink it or, if it is too thick, they suck it into their throats through

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the nostrils. My guide, Mindîl al-Ḳaṭ'i, had drunk such water on eight occasions and there is nobody among the Rwala who has not tasted it at least once. 271

Things are more serious with those traveling on foot who have no camel to kill. Thus there were four men from the Bnejje kin of the Rwala, who were driven off during a raid. They lost their camels and their weapons and escaped with their bare lives. One of them tied a small bag, *šakwa*, beneath his shirt, in which there were about three liters of water. They made their way home through the desert, living on various herbs and always drinking a little water after sunset. On the third day they had about a quarter of a liter left. They were all thirsty and yet each one urged the other to drink, but none would drink because there was not enough water for all. At last they decided to pour it away. They sipped the dew and went for two days without water. It was in the season of *as-smâk* (March and early April). After two days they could go no farther. By the will of Allâh some Ṣlejb saw them, brought them liquid butter, poured it into their mouths, and when they could swallow it gave them also water, thus saving their lives. In the seasons of *aṣ-ṣferi* and *aš-šta'* (October 1 to February 20) a man can go without water for as long as three days, but in the midsummer, *al-ḳêẓ*, only for one day and one night, or at the most for two nights and one day. On the second day his throat becomes parched and he dies.

The Rwala know very well which plants can be eaten. Often after an unsuccessful raid they wander on foot through the desert and live only on various herbs. They are most fond of eating the dark-red ripened fruit, *ṭel'*, of the thorny *mṣa'* shrub. These are very sweet and have a bitter aftertaste. The Rwala collect them and boil them into a thick syrup. From the wood of the tall *rimṭ* shrub there flows out in summer a sweet juice, which they likewise collect. *Ḳṣâma*, the ripe fruit of the *buṭum* tree, they pluck, dry, grind, and mix with wheat flour. They also extract oil from this fruit. They eat the raw stalks or tuberous growths of the following plants: *baḫatri*, *bṣejjel*, *ṭummejr*, *ǧirǧîr*, *ḫârra'*, *ḥumbejẓ* (or *ḥammejẓ*), *ḥampiṣ*, *ḥawwa'*, *da'lûḳ*, *rubaḥla*, *reśâd*, *roṣejla*, *ummu rweje*, *šaḫḫûm*, *ṭîṭa*, *ṣorrêṭ en-na'îm*, *ḳurrêṣ*, *karrâṭ kseǧbra*, *lubbêna*, *laḫjat eṭ-ṭeje*, *mâc'*. 262 222

The following are baked: *zebb eḍ-ḍîb*, *ṭarṭûṭ*, and *mḥarût*.